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TAGS: [SADC](#) [PREL](#) [ZA](#) [ZI](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: MWANAWASA ON CHINESE ARMS SHIPMENT, PRAISES SOUTH AFRICA AND MOZAMBIQUE

REF: STATE 42016

¶1. (SBU) Summary. President Mwanawasa extolled South Africa and Mozambique for refusing to offload a Chinese arms shipment headed to Zimbabwe and called on other countries to do likewise. He dismissed comments by a ruling party member, George Chumbwe, recommending the violent overthrow of Mugabe. The tide of Zambian public opinion is turning against Mugabe, thanks in part to Mwanawasa's bold statements as well as the Zimbabwean electoral impasse, which has shed light on Mugabe's human rights abuses. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On April 21, President Mwanawasa publicly praised South Africa and Mozambique for refusing to offload the Chinese arms shipment headed to Zimbabwe (Reftel). He expressed hope that other countries follow South Africa's and Mozambique's lead, saying that "we don't want (to) escalate the situation in Zimbabwe." In an unusually pointed remark, Mwanawasa suggested that "the Chinese can play a very useful role in Zimbabwe without the use of firearms."

¶3. (U) Mwanawasa also expressed regret for the statements of a member of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) ruling party, Geoffrey Chumbwe, who called for the violent overthrow of President Mugabe. Mwanawasa described the comments by the Lusaka Province MMD Chair as "irresponsible." He pointed to dialogue as the only answer to the crisis in Zimbabwe, as he distanced himself and the MMD party from Chumbwe's remarks.

¶4. (SBU) Chumbwe's comments, however, add to the chorus of disapproval and public criticism of Mugabe in Zambia. Even opposition party leader and former presidential candidate Michael Sata joined the refrain when he stated on April 16 that the "crisis" in Zimbabwe is an "eye-opener" to all African leaders and sheds light on Africa's problems. These words came as a surprise to many, given Sata's affiliation to Mugabe and his one-time intention to invite Mugabe to be his guest of honor in the event of his victory in the 2006 presidential elections.

¶5. (SBU) Comment. Mwanawasa, through his leadership in SADC, has helped open the discussion on Zimbabwe, demonstrating by his own example that Zimbabwe's crisis is an internal African problem and no longer "taboo." Mwanawasa's response to the electoral impasse in Zimbabwe appears to be turning the tide of Zambian public opinion against Mugabe. Many Zambians seem to have reframed their perspective on Zimbabwe's problems, looking beyond its economic woes (and land reform issues), to broader issues of human right abuse, poor governance, and disregard for democracy.  
MARTINEZ